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Title:

Opening industrial democracy seminar, Royal Adelaide Hospital

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Dr. Shey, Mr. Hooper, Ladies and Gentlemen :

You are very trusting people, inviting a politician to a "talk-in", and I was very pleased to accept your invitation to join in your discussions on the progress and possible extension of industrial democracy at the R.A.H.

Your programme for industrial democracy was one of the first established in the public sector, and since those first steps towards greater staff involvement in 1972, the

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structure of representation and participation has changed greatly.

From an initial, fairly limited objective of involving staff members in problem solving schemes within the hospital, the participatory structures have evolved to the present Joint Consultative Council arrangement.

During that period of experimentation and adaption, the basic criterion of industrial democracy - the involvement of employees in decisions which will affect their work environment - has guided the changes which have been made.

This talk-in today is an example of the

process of industrial democracy at work, and the syndicate groups which will discuss the various topics later today will enable the participation process to be shared in greater detail by more people.

That sharing of decision making and advisory procedures is the touchstone of the Government's commitment to industrial democracy, and it is very encouraging to me that so many of you are involving yourselves in the programme at the R.A.H.

Industrial democracy is essential if industrialised societies are to retain human

characteristics and the opportunity for people to use their own lives to the fullest.

Countries which rely on technology and industrialisation may advance in output of material goods, but there is a severe social legacy of automation and mass production, and that is the alienation of many workers from their workplace and from the community in which they live.

As more crafts and trades are replaced or complemented by mass production techniques, the normal mode of manufacturing has changed from the skilled tradesman working on a range of individual jobs unskilled or

semi-skilled process worker operating a machine which turns out a very high number of standardised products.

If we look at any industry which ten or twenty years ago employed a large number of tradesmen, we will find that the proportion of tradesmen has decreased and the number of tasks now performed by mass production techniques is far greater. The building industry for example has seen the development of prefabricated, machine produced housing components which would have been the exclusive preserve of tradesmen until fairly recently.

Going beyond manufacturing industries to tertiary and public sector areas such as this hospital, there has been a parallel tendency to increasing automation and specialisation, which have contributed to a similar feeling of remoteness and, sometimes, lack of purpose on the part of many employees.

We can't be Luddites, and try to stop the advances in technology which are accelerating these trends, if for no other reason than we would be no more successful in our efforts than the original Luddites were in holding back the industrialisation of Britain.

The task which faces the community as a whole is to ensure that change is in the best interests of the society, that the benefits of that change are shared by as many people as possible and that people understand what is happening and how it will affect their lives.

The most effective way of achieving those objectives is to involve people in the whole spectrum of decision making processes in the community. In other words, ensure that democracy is not a meaningless concept.

To make democracy relevant and effective involves giving people a role in the

processes by which a whole range of decisions are made which affect their lives.

In South Australia we have almost completed that task in as far as the Parliament is concerned, and we are moving towards it in local government, but these representative institutions affect only part of the community's life.

As well as decisions made by Government, decisions made at work, in local community groups and in educational institutions have a significant bearing on people.

The Government's industrial democracy programme is designed to extend the

principles of democracy into the work place so that employees don't feel that they are simply cogs in a large, impersonal and uncaring system.

Individual employees should be able to know what the organisation which employs them is doing about certain issues, what its future policy may be and what other sections within the same organisation are doing and saying about these matters.

Modern industrial and institutional situations can no longer be considered, either by management or employees, as being simply a

monolithic structure which is ordered from the top and that those orders and the motives underlying them are unquestioningly accepted throughout the system.

If we take this hospital, it is a pluralistic and diverse organisation, which has needs which firstly differ from other hospitals in the Hospitals Department and secondly needs which differ among individual sections of the R.A.H.

The most effective way those internal needs and shades of grey can be resolved is through the procedures which we are discussing today - communication and participation.

As well, all public sector organisations, but particularly public undertakings, must use their resources as efficiently as possible and provide services in the practical and workable manner.

The South Australian Government has taken the initiative in setting up the framework of industrial democracy in the public sector because we believe that it will be successful from both social and efficiency viewpoints and that this success will prove to the private sector that industrial democracy is necessary and practical.

It is an area in which we must hasten slowly, firstly because so little has been done in Australia that the amount of experience we can draw from is limited and secondly because the structures of individual organisations vary so markedly that a model of industrial democracy has to be worked out extremely carefully.

Industrial democracy must develop organically within any establishment; the very act of drawing up a participatory scheme must in itself rely on the participation of most employees.

Again, take the evolution of the structures at the R.A.H. Many of you probably feel that the system can be still further improved, but it will not be accomplished overnight because the diversity of professional disciplines and work-roles within the hospital mean that there must be a concensus among many disparate sections that the improvement is needed.

One important section of any organisation discussing industrial democracy is management, and there is often a feeling among both employees and management that participatory programmes will hinder the work of the administrators.

The simplest answer to that notion is to say : ask the administrators in organisations which have introduced industrial democracy. They will say quite unequivocally that, despite the changes in attitudes and assumptions required by both the worker and the executive, greater participation and involvement has benefited the entire organisation.

One of the most important factors in efficiency is the presence of a committed and motivated work-force, and many companies are finding that the more they share responsibilities with their employees, the better those responsibilities are being discharged by people from the most senior executive to the

most recent addition to the shop floor crew.

As those responsibilities are shared, management has become less remote and more sympathetic to the problems of the people who actually keep the company working. This has been proven to be especially so in large diversified organisations where devolution of control to subsidiary groups and the subsequent involvement of employees in those subsidiaries has made the individual units more efficient, and the total organisation more productive.

Industrial democracy is a challenge to both employees and management because it involves changes in attitude and, in the case of employees, the assumption of more responsibility for the organisation which employs them.

The programmes we are building are not simply additional ways for workers to get more from any organisation without any additional responsibility on the workers' part.

The industrial democracy programmes we are working towards in South Australia require commitments in attitude and practice which go past traditional employee approaches to the workplace.

Those changes are necessary if industrialised societies are to be liveable and enjoyable communities and they are inevitable if social democratic parties are to continue towards our goal of making democracy fully social.